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The INAUGURAL
ADDRESS *of*
GOVERNOR DENNEY
Delivered at DOVER
on JANUARY THE
EIGHTEENTH, NINE-
TEEN TWENTY-ONE



INAUGURAL ADDRESS
of WILLIAM D. DENNEY
GOVERNOR of DELAWARE

Delivered before the
98TH SESSION OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AT DOVER, ✻ ✻
January eighteenth,
Nineteen twenty-one



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Inaugural Address

*Members of the General Assembly
and Fellow Citizens:*

In view of the able and exhaustive message of my predecessor to the General Assembly I deem it unnecessary at this time to do more than refer briefly to certain matters of Government and public concern to which I think your attention should be called. Later in the session I may address the General Assembly more specifically and at greater length upon some subjects respecting which legislation might be advantageous to the State.

In connection with State and local government there has been much discussion of the budget system, and I am heartily in favor of its adoption. It would undoubtedly insure the conduct of government along business lines, and result in greater economy on the part of public servants, as well as the reduction of expense and elimination of waste. If wisely planned and faithfully carried out there can be no doubt of its success. But it must not be forgotten that the best system will be disappointing if the officials who spend the money of the State

are not careful, economical and efficient. An up-to-date fiscal system is highly important, but not more so than the character of public servants. I hope to be controlled by this thought in making appointments to office, and trust no one will expect me to be influenced by any consideration other than the public good.

One of the most serious defects in our system of State Government is the limited authority vested in the State Auditor's office. Under the present system this office does not audit or control as fully as it should have the power to do. While, as the name implies, it was intended as a check on the various departments, officers and other agencies spending moneys of the State appropriated by the Legislature, it does not perform that function. The result is that thousands of dollars are spent every year without the State exercising the least supervision or control over the details of such expenditures. This is not the fault of the officer but the fault of the law creating the office. While the office is created by the Constitution, the General Assembly may define its powers and duties. I would earnestly commend this matter to your attention.

There is a strong feeling among our people that the expense of maintaining the government of this State is far greater than it should be. If there are abuses or extravagances the enactment of a proper budget law and the creation of a proper and effective State Auditor's department would go far toward preventing them in the future.

Another thought prevalent among the people is that there are too many commissions clothed with

power to spend the public funds. Undoubtedly this thought is well founded and it is the duty of the legislature to curtail the number by abolishing those whose work do not justify their continued existence, and consolidating others that seek to accomplish the same object independently and often at cross purposes. The Executives and Legislatures of other States have been confronted with a like problem and the solution seems to be the reduction of the large number of commissions to a few, co-ordinated so far as possible, and all subject to some central authority.

It is quite possible that waste and extravagance in the expenditure of the public moneys may be exaggerated in the minds of the people but the general belief is perhaps not surprising.

In this connection permit me to say that in my opinion the Governor should not be a member of any commission that must spend the money of the State. He should be at all times in a position to call any such commissions to account and have a free hand in dealing with it in such manner as his duty to the State requires. He is the representative of the people, and must conserve their interests to the full extent of his ability.

It is more difficult for him to do his duty in this regard if he is himself a member of a commission that is subject to criticism. My feeling about the matter is so strong that it will be gratifying if the legislature shall relieve the Governor of membership on any such commission.

During the past two years our citizens have been giving an unusual degree of thought to the

problems of public education. This is a healthy sign. We are more interested in the welfare of our children than in anything else. I am willing to believe that the many criticisms of the School Code of 1919 and the School Law passed at the Special Session of the General Assembly in 1920 were honestly offered. It is not a sign that the people of Delaware are opposed to good education, it simply means that they want a system of education which they can understand, which will fit the peculiar needs of the State and which will not impose too great a tax-burden upon any class or section of the population.

I would recommend that we all forget past differences of opinion and that we bury any ill-feeling which may have grown up during the past two years. Let us get together and study the situation in a calm and patriotic spirit.

Whatever has proved to have been of value in the much discussed School Code let us keep; whatever has failed to produce good results let us change.

If I understand aright the report which the State Board of Education has made to this Legislature some notable results have been achieved but even this does not prove that we cannot do better in the future.

May I point out that practically every State in the Union is in a similar condition of unrest about public education. And everywhere the problem is the same—the high cost of maintaining a modern system of schools. In Delaware we want

our children to have educational advantages equal to those enjoyed by the children of other States. The chief question we have to answer is how we can finance such a system. You, the representatives of the people, are called upon to find a satisfactory answer to that question. I feel convinced that if we can obtain the money necessary for running our schools without placing an unwarranted burden of taxation upon any group or class of our taxpayers, all of the other difficulties in connection with our school laws will be quickly and satisfactorily settled. I ask you therefore to give the closest possible attention to the financial aspect of this problem.

But I think it only right to apprise the Legislature that I cannot conscientiously approve any repeal of the present School Laws unless a just and a satisfactory substitute bill is passed by the General Assembly.

No one can ride over the beautiful and substantial concrete roads that have been constructed in our State without experiencing a feeling of pleasure and a wish that the mileage was greater than it is. We would all like to see such highways continuous, north and south, east and west, both for purposes of personal pleasure and business profit. Too much credit and praise cannot be given to those generous and public spirited citizens who have been instrumental in making such conditions possible. We know their efforts are fully appreciated and trust their good work and interest in better roads will continue. The State would gladly continue to supplement their work if it was finan-

cially able to do so, but how long can the State and counties stand the great expense in view of the present high cost of construction?

Economy must be practiced and money saved along this and other lines or much more will have to be raised by bond issues or large increase in taxation. It is my hope that by conducting the business of the State along strictly business lines, just as a successful corporation is conducted, we may be able to avoid any considerable issue of bonds or increase in taxation. The State is financially prosperous now, but we have no assurance that our large income derived mainly from corporations chartered by the State will continue much longer.

It is probable that the General Assembly will be asked during the present session to make appropriations for various purposes far greater than were ever made, or asked for before. Of course appropriations must be made and the State should not be parsimonious in providing for objects that are essential and good. But it does seem that in view of present conditions the construction of buildings of all kinds not absolutely and immediately essential, should be reduced to a minimum. We must recognize the fact that our State is small, with resources comparatively limited, and that we cannot do some of the things that larger States can well afford to do. Naturally we want to keep reasonably abreast of the times in all good works, but in our enthusiasm for improvement we must count the cost and carefully consider our ability to pay. Delaware has been conservative in the past,

but that very conservatism has enabled her to avoid many of the experiments that have proved so costly to other and larger States.

We are proud of our institutions, and of none more than Delaware College which is rapidly growing in size and influence and reflecting much credit upon the State. May I request that in your visit to Newark you will pay careful attention to the needs of this institution. I think you will find that the College authorities have always been reasonable and modest in their requests for appropriations; indeed, I think they have been so modest that the College has been in danger of having its work limited for lack of funds. Other institutions of learning are able to take some of our most promising professors by offering larger salaries. In this connection I would suggest that you give particular attention to the wish of the College authorities that the name be changed from Delaware College to the University of Delaware. By making it a university you will give a more honorable position to its professors; you will make it what it really is—an institution belonging to all of the people of the State without regard to location, denomination or political affiliation—and you will be doing only what other States have done for their institutions of learning. May I also ask that you will give your best thought to the question of the development of the Women's College. Two years ago a teachers' training department was started within the College which already has about fifty pupils. These young ladies are taking a two years' course with a view to teaching in the schools of our own State. It qualifies

the young women of our own homes to do work of great value to the State as a whole and at the same time to receive a high grade certificate and consequently more pay for their labors. In order adequately to take care of this branch of the work it would seem as if a new residence hall were in immediate demand, and I should be happy if you could reach the conclusion that such a need will be met by this session of the Legislature.

Our State College for Colored Students is in a transition period. I understand that the Delaware School Auxiliary Association is willing to put the buildings and grounds in condition for first class work if the State will make adequate provision for teaching the pupils enrolled. The Colored College should be an institution which will give a thorough industrial training to the colored children of Delaware, and I think you will recognize the justice of the claims that are made upon you by the Trustees of the institution.

With the hope of improving political conditions some new things have been tried in this and other States in the last few years; one of them is the direct primary law. It is certain that every new thing in government is not an improvement on the old. It matters not how good the intention, or how strong the hope of those responsible for the change, it is usually an experiment and sometimes a failure. It may be perfect in theory and exceedingly bad in practice. It would be well for the legislature to carefully consider the primary law, now that it has been given a fair trial and determine whether it has accomplished the good hoped for. Does it secure

better candidates, and does it justify the expense of its operation? The nominating conventions of parties in this State have usually been composed of representative citizens, of character and capacity, and it is a question whether nominations made by them are not more likely to be of higher grade than those made through the activities of a few persons in the district and under a law that compels a candidate to seek the office and not the office to seek the man. Very often the best citizens will not do this, indeed sometimes they have to be persuaded to accept.

We have entered upon an era of government in which the women of the State are entitled, equally with men, to the right to participate in political affairs and I trust they will bring to the task qualities that will make conditions better than they have been in the past. Surely along some, if not all lines, their opinions and efforts will be helpful and those who have opposed as well as those who have favored equal suffrage should exercise the political rights to which they are entitled to the end that better government may be secured. It is to be hoped that they will make their influence for good felt in many ways and particularly in the selection of candidates for office. Although good men have been nominated as a rule, there have been some exceptions, and our new voters will have the power to prevent such mistakes in the future. Even though their influence should be felt in no other way, this alone would be ample justification for their enfranchisement. It is certain they will not stand for intemperance and immor-

ality anywhere, and especially in the persons who make or administer the laws of the State. Having been given the right to vote we believe they will exercise it wisely and become potential factors in the effort that should be made to secure a more intelligent, effective and economical government.

There has never been a time when there was better reason for a State guard than there is to-day. It would surely give the people a feeling of greater security if there were some organized force within our borders that might be called upon for assistance in an emergency that justified the call. The old militia law has become practically ineffective since the passage of the Federal Statute which provides for the organization of a federalized force within the State. If such a guard should be recruited here, which I strongly hope may be done, it would constitute a complete regimental unit. The expense of the regiment would be borne largely by the Federal Government. The unit would be sufficiently attractive and useful to enlist the services of our young men as well as to secure a reasonable amount of financial assistance from the State. In these critical times I feel sure our citizens would welcome such an institution, and feel that a comparatively small amount of money appropriated for the purpose would be amply justified. A committee representing those who saw service in the last war is preparing concrete suggestions as the result of their experience and in conformity with The National Defense Act and I recommend the result of their labor to your consideration.

While I conceive it to be the duty of the Gov-

ernor to give the General Assembly any information he may possess and to make any suggestions, or requests, respecting legislation that will, in his opinion, be for the best interest of the State and aid the members in the performance of their public duties, there will be no effort on my part to unduly influence their votes. It is the theory of our government that the independence of its different branches shall be recognized and maintained, and while my office will be open at all times to any member who may wish to confer with me, I shall not attempt to influence his action against his own judgment and conscience by any improper means.

It will be my policy, not to attempt to control, but to co-operate with the legislature in securing such legislation as will be for the best interest of the people. By this is not meant that the Governor will approve all the General Assembly may do but that its members will be free to perform their duties unembarrassed by executive interference. If convinced that any legislative action is wrong it will be my duty to exercise the veto power conferred by the Constitution; but it will not be done until the matter in question has been carefully considered, nor unless good reason can be given for non-approval.

The success and prosperity of our State depend as well upon those who work in the shops as upon those who work in the fields. If one class suffers the other also suffers. It is my thought that if you improve the conditions of either of these classes you materially aid all the people of the State.

We are mutually dependent, perhaps more so than in larger States, and it is important, therefore, that we help one another as best we can. In recent years the citizens of the lower counties have become better acquainted with Wilmington than in the past. This is due largely to the State Fair, Delaware College, the meetings of the State Bankers Association held throughout the State and better means of transportation. And as the relationship becomes closer and acquaintance better, farm, town and city will be mutually helpful in many ways. We are all proud of Wilmington, our rapidly growing city, and deeply interested in its future growth and prosperity. Unquestionably one of the greatest benefits to the city just now would be a larger amount of self government, and a new charter adequate to its needs.

It may not be necessary to call attention to the importance of the good work being carried on in this State that has for its object the conservation of child welfare and the public health. I shall not dwell on it further than to say that manifestly nothing can be more essential to the well being of the people and any assistance that the State can afford to render will be as good an investment as can possibly be made. But in this connection I want to call attention to the work that is being quietly done, mainly in the City of Wilmington, a work of which most of the people of this State know little.

I refer to the activities of the Delaware Safety Council. This organization has for its object the prevention of preventable accidents, and in conse-

quence the saving of life and limb. To show the importance of this work it is only necessary to state that in the last four years a large number of our citizens have lost their lives or sustained serious injuries through accidents, and the consequent economic loss to the State has been very great. The Delaware Safety Council is a voluntary non-profit-
ing body of citizens which for more than a year has made its influence felt. The Council's work is educational and corrective, it tends to lessen the burden on our charitable institutions by reducing the number of accident cases, and seeks to develop and stimulate all appropriate agencies.

Another subject to which I wish to make brief reference is the work done by the Americanization Schools of Delaware under the auspices of the State and Local Boards of Education. These schools have been carried on under an appropriation made at the last regular session. I am told that through them, over two thousand men and women residing in Delaware and representing thirty-one different countries have been given instruction in the English language and the fundamental principles of American liberty. Only through such education can the future unity and loyalty of our citizenship be assured and I commend it to your attention. There is an unusual degree of mutual confidence and understanding between the native and foreign-born elements of our population, and I believe that this is due in no small measure to the work of assimilation promoted by the Americanization classes.

In conclusion permit me to express the hope that business conditions here and elsewhere may

soon improve, and the present state of unrest may soon pass, and that the unemployed may have employment. I realize, as you must, that the new administration begins at a rather inauspicious time, but conditions are no worse here than in other states. The times require patience, as well as the serious thought and careful act of every public servant and of none more than the legislative and executive departments of the State. The most difficult and troublesome duty a government has to perform is that of taxation, and it behooves those entrusted with that work to see to it that money is not raised and spent for purposes that are wasteful, extravagant or unnecessary. I know the people of this State well enough to say they are in favor of better schools, better roads and other improvements, but many of them think that we should not try to accomplish too much at once. They believe in gradual rather than radical improvement, but when it is shown that a law is necessary for the public good, that it is just in its provisions, and wisely administered I have no doubt that they will be reasonably content.

The citizens of the State performed their duty nobly during the war, and there has been no failure since to do their full part in relieving distress and suffering across the seas. Our soldiers, and others in the service, whether at the front or not, were real patriots and intensely loyal to their country and state. They sacrificed much for the sake of humanity during the war and were willing to give their lives and all they possessed for the good of the cause. Any reasonable demands they may make I

am sure will not fall on deaf ears but will meet a glad response from those who can appreciate real courage, unselfish devotion and true manhood. But all our people have made real sacrifices for humanity in other lands, and are now hopefully looking for the time when their own burdens shall be made easier to bear.

The State has successfully passed through some trying experiences during its long, eventful and honored history, and the splendid record made in the past will not be marred during the readjustment trials we are experiencing now.

The serious conditions existing to-day, economic and otherwise, were caused in a large measure by the world war, and will disappear as time goes by. But in the process of reconstruction difficult problems have arisen, and others will arise before readjustment is complete. They will try the patience and test the wisdom of every one in private or official life.

But whatever may be the work required for the betterment of individual and State, we may be sure that Delaware will do her part for she has ever been among the first, and never last, in all good works.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Wm. D. Seney". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.

